



[Charles Fourier, 1772 - 1837](#)

Utopia and Science

In this, the last of this week's part of the course on Philosophy and Religion, we link once again to Engels' "Socialism, Utopian and Scientific" (attached, in three parts). This is a short text extracted by Engels from his larger work, "Anti-Dühring", and it helps us to place thought in a historical framework. For example, dealing with the period subsequent to the Renaissance and prior to the French Revolution that is often referred to as "The Enlightenment", Engels writes:

"We know today that this kingdom of reason was nothing more than the idealized kingdom of the bourgeoisie; that this eternal Right found its realization in bourgeois

justice; that this equality reduced itself to bourgeois equality before the law; that bourgeois property was proclaimed as one of the essential rights of man; and that the government of reason, the Contrat Social [Social Contract] of Rousseau, came into being, and only could come into being, as a democratic bourgeois republic. The great thinkers of the 18th century could, no more than their predecessors, go beyond the limits imposed upon them by their epoch.”

Here Engels describes the limitation imposed upon the human Subject by the objective circumstances, and also the possibility of transcending such limitations. This is humanism. Humanism says that humans build humanity within the given material world and history.

Nowhere does Engels say that humanity is an accidental combination of atoms and molecules.

Yet, by sometimes chastising the great Hegel with the same kind of roughness as he treated the nonentity Dühring, Engels sowed the seeds of others’ subsequent and greater errors. Such an error came about when the dichotomy of “idealism and materialism” was elevated to a master-narrative of philosophy, which it is not. Humanity is not reducible to matter.

As great as he was, communists have in practice relied too heavily upon Engels to teach them philosophy. As a result they have magnified Engels’ otherwise unremarkable mistakes to

monstrous proportions. The main one of these is the denigration of “idealism” and the perverse worship of “materialism”. Whereas it is the free-willing human Subject which was at the centre of Marx’s work, and which must be at the centre of any communist’s work.

The image is of [Charles Fourier](#) (1772-1837), maybe the greatest of the utopian socialists, and also the inventor of the word “feminism”. The utopian socialists were prominent after the Great French Revolution that started in 1789 with the storming of the Bastille on the 14th of July of that year. Marx and Engels wrote of them in the third part of [Chapter 3 of the 1848 Communist Manifesto](#), called “Critical-Utopian Socialism and Communism”.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Socialism, Utopian and Scientific, 1880, Engels](#).
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